

Spoelstra quickly agreed to take Olympic role

BY TIM REYNOLDS
AP BASKETBALL WRITER

MIAMI — At a dinner in Miami back in August, across the street from the arena where the Heat play their games, USA Basketball men's national team managing director Grant Hill had a question for Erik Spoelstra.

Hill wasn't even done asking before Spoelstra gave his answer.

"I'm in," Spoelstra said.

With that, USA Basketball had its next Olympic coach. Hill didn't have to finish asking the question. Everybody knew the deal was done.

And now, the process of getting ready for the 2027 World Cup in Qatar and the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics can officially begin. Spoelstra — who was announced as coach earlier this week — and Hill sat side-by-side on Thursday, USA Basketball pins on the left lapel of their blue suit jackets, starting to lay out the plan toward what they hope is more gold for the U.S.

"We got our guy," Hill said.

Spoelstra had some of his family — his sister and his three children — at the news conference, along with USA Basketball executives Jim Tooley and Sean Ford, Heat President Pat Riley, Heat CEO Nick Arison and virtually the entire Heat coaching staff.

"I understand the expectations and the responsibility of this position," Spoelstra said.

If he didn't understand, Heat players crashed the news conference to make sure he understood. Heat captain Bam Adebayo has been part of the last two Olympic gold medal wins for the U.S., and he and many other teammates were waving small American flags and chanted "U-S-A!" much

to Spoelstra's delight.

Adebayo has said he wants to play in the 2027 World Cup and 2028 Olympics as well.

"Spo's a genius," Adebayo said.

Spoelstra worked his way through the USA Basketball ranks, first as the coach of the select team that helped the Olympic team that Gregg Popovich coached to gold at the Tokyo Games in 2021, then as an assistant under Steve Kerr for the World Cup in 2023 and the Paris Games in 2024. His ties to USA Basketball extend even beyond that; Spoelstra went to multiple camps with Olympic teams when Heat players like Dwyane Wade, LeBron James and Chris Bosh were part of U.S. rosters.

"Coach Spoelstra represents everything we strive to be," Hill said.

Spoelstra decided to take the job only after seeing how much USA Basketball welcomes family; he had his kids with him in Paris. Making commitments for both the summer of 2027 and summer of 2028 — always busy times for kids — wouldn't have happened if his family couldn't be along for the ride.

"The culture of family within USAB is simply remarkable," Spoelstra said. "The experience that we had as a family at the Olympics will be memories that we'll have for the rest of our lives. So, I couldn't be more thrilled about this opportunity, and I'm really looking forward to the challenge."

Also not lost on Spoelstra: He's the first Filipino-American who will have this role.

"That's America, right?" Spoelstra said.

Spoelstra has been with the Heat for more than 30 years

now, starting in the video room — he actually was hired shortly before the franchise brought Riley in to lead the basketball operations in September 1995 — on his way to becoming head coach. He's been with the Heat for all three of their NBA titles, the last two coming with him as head coach, and is generally considered a lock for enshrinement one day in the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame.

"I'm so grateful for the opportunity of these 30 years to work for the Heat," Spoelstra said.

Spoelstra will become the 17th different coach to take the U.S. men into an Olympics. Of the previous 16, 14 led the team to at least one gold medal.

Spoelstra was believed to be under consideration when Hill — in what was his first major decision as managing director of the men's national team, the position he took after Jerry Colangelo helped the Americans win four consecutive Olympic gold medals in that role — hired Kerr in December 2021 for that World Cup and Olympic cycle.

Hill made that decision with Spoelstra in mind for this Olympic cycle, even orchestrating that he spend some time with Popovich after the Tokyo Games to plant some seeds.

"It worked out," Hill said.

Spoelstra knew shortly after Kerr's hiring that he was going to be part of the coaching staff for the 2023 World Cup and 2024 Olympics. He indicated that USA Basketball might take a little time before finalizing his group of assistants, and Hill said it may go into next year.

"We've just talked loosely

about it, but really no specifics yet," Spoelstra said. "We'll start with the initial conversations about the pool of candidates and then also the staff, then start to talk loosely about the logistics of the World Cup."

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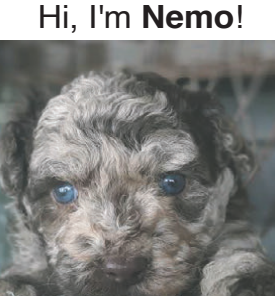
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